

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 7

February 1, 1996, 1:32 p.m.
Page S-683 Temp. Record

FARM BILL/Cloture (on the Bill)

SUBJECT: Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996 . . . S. 1541. Craig motion to close debate.

ACTION: CLOTURE MOTION REJECTED, 53-45

SYNOPSIS: As introduced, S. 1541, the Agricultural Market Transition Act of 1996, will make sweeping changes to the Nation's farm policies. Farm programs will be reformed to allow farmers to plant what they want when they want, acreage reduction programs will be eliminated, and spending on farm programs will be capped so that subsidy payments will decline as part of a 7-year transition to full market-oriented farming.

On January 31, 1996, Senator Craig sent to the desk, for himself and others, a motion to close debate on the bill. By unanimous consent, the vote on that motion was scheduled for February 1, 1996.

NOTE: A three-fifths majority (60) vote of the Senate is required to invoke cloture. See also vote No. 9.

Those favoring the motion to invoke cloture contended:

S. 1541 will dramatically change America's farm policy for the better. The broad maze of existing regulations for providing crop support payments will be replaced with a capped program in which program participants will receive a payment over the next 7 years based on the current program's spending level. This change will eliminate confusion and bring more certainty to farmers' planting decisions. More importantly, instead of following Federal diktats, farmers will decide what to plant and when based on market conditions. These reforms will result in declining support payments and increased farmer independence from Washington, D.C., paving the way for a full transition to market-based farming. Ending Federal control over farming will result in substantial savings--\$4.6 billion--for the American taxpayers. These savings will come on top of the \$7 billion to \$8 billion reduction in the agricultural spending baseline. That baseline has been reduced because recent high market prices for agricultural goods have resulted in reestimates of the amounts that will be spent on deficiency payments.

A deficiency, or crop support, payment is currently the difference between the target price set by the Government for a program

(See other side)

YEAS (53)			NAYS (45)			NOT VOTING (1)	
Republicans (50 or 94%)	Democrats (3 or 7%)		Republicans (3 or 6%)	Democrats (42 or 93%)		Republicans (0)	Democrats (1)
Abraham	Helms	Johnston	Gregg	Akaka	Heflin		Rockefeller- ^{2AN}
Ashcroft	Hutchison	Pell	Santorum	Baucus	Hollings		
Bennett	Inhofe	Wellstone	Smith	Biden	Inouye		
Bond	Jeffords			Bingaman	Kennedy		
Brown	Kassebaum			Boxer	Kerrey		
Burns	Kempthorne			Bradley	Kerry		
Campbell	Kyl			Breaux	Kohl		
Chafee	Lott			Bryan	Lautenberg		
Coats	Lugar			Bumpers	Leahy		
Cochran	Mack			Byrd	Levin		
Cohen	McCain			Conrad	Lieberman		
Coverdell	McConnell			Daschle	Mikulski		
Craig	Murkowski			Dodd	Moseley-Braun		
D'Amato	Nickles			Dorgan	Moynihan		
DeWine	Pressler			Exon	Murray		
Dole	Roth			Feingold	Nunn		
Domenici	Shelby			Feinstein	Pryor		
Faircloth	Simpson			Ford	Reid		
Frist	Snowe			Glenn	Robb		
Gorton	Specter			Graham	Sarbanes		
Gramm	Stevens			Harkin	Simon		
Grams	Thomas						
Grassley	Thompson						
Hatch	Thurmond						
Hatfield	Warner						

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

crop and its market price, when the market price is lower. This system gives farmers some protection when they have crops to sell. Farmers who enroll in crop support programs must accept a wide range of restrictions from the Federal Government in return. The Secretary of Agriculture recently noted that he was worried that prices were so high that farmers might refuse to enroll in the program, thereby ending Federal control over farmers. We do not share that worry, nor do farmers. Every major farm group has endorsed this legislation. Farmers are ready to give up Federal support in return for being given the freedom to farm. Farmers do not want competitors who distort the marketplace by taking Federal assistance. They want a level playing field, and with that field they, and we, are certain they can out-compete any farmers in the world.

Some of our Democratic colleagues have unfortunately decided to try to make this bill partisan. Certainly there have been some differences, with Democrats (of course) favoring more spending and a more intrusive Federal role than Republicans desire, but those differences should not preclude compromise. In fact, in large measure they have not prevented compromise so far, and in the end we expect that a bipartisan consensus on this bill will emerge. Last year the Senate Agriculture Committee held thorough hearings on the Farm Bill. In total, 15 hearings were held, involving 157 witnesses. Additional and lengthy hearings were held on farm legislation in the Budget Committee. Those hearings resulted in a great deal of consensus. For instance, four of the titles of this bill were given preliminary unanimous approval by the Agriculture Committee.

The bipartisan atmosphere in the Committee broke down, though, when the issue became spending. When the Committee was given its reconciliation instructions, Democrats on the Committee announced that they would not participate in deciding how to reduce spending by the amount required. The size of the required cuts, coupled with the fact that the existing Farm Bill was expiring, made it a given that the Committee would have to meet its instructions through its Farm Bill reform proposals. Democrats, therefore, effectively refused to participate in the drafting of the Farm Bill. That first Farm Bill, which was drafted by Republicans because Democrats refused to participate, was included in the Balanced Budget Act. President Clinton vetoed that Act.

The bill we are about to vote to invoke cloture on, with a few minor modifications, is the same bill that was included in the Balanced Budget Act. It will reduce the deficit, reduce Federal regulations, and it is supported by America's farmers. Unfortunately, though, most of our Democratic colleagues believe they know what is better for farmers than do farmers themselves. Unfortunately, most of our Democratic colleagues are determined to keep spending more money on agricultural programs that farmers themselves are willing to give up. Therefore, we know that it is unlikely that cloture will be invoked on this meritorious bill.

All is not lost, however. Bipartisanship has begun to return. The pending substitute amendment will certainly gain more Democratic votes, and we are confident that an agreement will soon be reached that will make it possible to bring this bill to a vote on final passage. A majority of Democrats may have chosen to filibuster this bill, and they will certainly succeed in frustrating the will of the majority on this vote, but in the end we are confident that bipartisanship will prevail over politics and this bill will pass.

Those opposing the motion to invoke cloture contended:

This so-called freedom-to-farm bill will shred the Federal Government safety net that for 60 years has protected the American farmer and made American agriculture the envy of the world. The key change of this bill is that it will eliminate deficiency payments. For the next 7 years, fixed, declining payments will be made to those farmers who currently are in the crop support program, but the intent is to eventually get rid of any aid. We firmly oppose this policy. America gives deficiency payments to protect the small family farmer, in recognition of the fact that farming is like no other business in the world. Senators may talk all they wish about farmers making rational business decisions just like all other businessmen, but other businessmen do not face the type of unpredictable risks that farmers face. A farmer could lose his crops to flooding, or he could just as easily lose the value of his crops if he loses his export markets due to favorable weather conditions overseas. In this capital-intensive business, a few years of bad luck will wipe out most small farmers. Large, corporate farmers can absorb losses over a longer period of time. Thus, eliminating price supports will make farming in America strictly under the control of a few monolithic corporate farms.

Making matters worse, this bill will give payments to farmers no matter what. In good times and bad, and whether they even plant a crop or not, they will receive payments. Conceivably, a farmer could receive the maximum crop payment of \$40,000 for leaving his fields unplanted while he cavorted in Hawaii for a year. Those Senators who are sick of hearing the distorted press reports on how horrible it is that we give "welfare" subsidies to farmers for the crops they plant will long for those press reports once they hear the stories about farmers being paid not to plant anything at all. Some Senators may counter that we already have numerous programs to pay farmers not to plant, but in those cases we at least are paying them for such reasons as to protect wetlands. In this case, there will be no public benefit.

We have other objections to this bill as well. For instance, export promotion programs will be cut and capped, food welfare programs will not receive needed reauthorizations, and many farmland conservation programs will be essentially phased-out. Overall, we find very little to commend in this bill. Spending on agricultural programs has already been cut by 60 percent over the past 10 years. This bill continues that trend, with the goal of eventually doing away entirely with agricultural programs. We will not endorse a plan to restructure our agricultural policy so radically. Changes should be made slowly and carefully. We urge our colleagues to show some moderation by joining us in voting against the motion to invoke cloture.